

Volkswagen Converter Problems?

Issues with Volkswagen Cars

Some recent Volkswagen models have been seeing higher than market average converter failures. These models are primarily, Beetle, Jetta, Passat, Golf, and Audi A4 and A6 models. The catalytic converters are failing in several different ways, depending on the vehicle. We are going to talk about the most common issues and how to avoid problems down the road.

1.8L Turbo

Volkswagen 1.8L Turbo equipped vehicles typically have converters located immediately after the turbo. While we have not identified all the causes of failure, one common problem is the turbo shaft seal inside the can fail allowing raw oil to enter the exhaust, where it plugs up or coats the converter substrate. This carbon coating on reduces the converters effectiveness substantially. Removal of the carbon build up prior to replacing the converter is strongly recommended. If there is evidence of a seal failure in the turbo, this must be repaired and addressed. A restrictor should be installed into the oil line leading to the turbo to prevent excessive oil pressure to the turbo.

2.0L

These vehicles manufactured from 1996—2001 were manufactured with defective MAF sensors. These sensors did not provide the vehicles computer with accurate air density data, and cause the vehicle to run excessively rich. The excess fuel causes carbon build up and drivability problems. The rich mixture also damages the O2 sensors and the catalyst itself. The inner portion of the converter heats up more rapidly than the outside edges. This causes the substrate to develop cracks that eventually cause it to fail. This is not covered under warranty by the dealer.

2.8L Turbo and Non-Turbo

The 2.8L suffers from some of the same fuel management problems as the 2.0L. If the O2 sensor(s) has not been previously replaced, we recommend doing so. However, the majority of the problems experienced in the 2.8L are related to head bolts that loosen and back out of their holes. This in turn causes the head gasket to fail. Simply tightening the head bolts will not solve the problem. The head must be removed and the gasket replaced. In addition, many VR6 models use metallic substrate in their converters, that while desirable for performance and airflow requirements, has a greater tendency to loose efficiency and typically has lower efficiencies than comparable ceramic units. Our replacement units feature quality ceramic substrates for this very reason.

Aftermarket vs. OEM

We prefer the aftermarket parts manufactured by DEC to the original equipment for these applications, mostly due to improved reliability and a low incidence of problems. Remanufactured original equipment converters are often prone to failures which carry over from defects in the original designs. The aftermarket parts we supply for these applications are designed to exceed OEM requirements, and above all, to prevent the CEL from being set. Most European cars are known for their performance and sound, so each part is designed to maintain optimum performance and sound.

Has Quality Improved?

Volkswagen was recently purchased by Porsche. As a result we believe that Volkswagen will fix many of these issues and dramatically improved the quality of their cars in the future. However, most of their products currently in the marketplace will continue to have similar problems. The above mentioned problems may persist beyond the 2000—2001 era. The replacement parts we offer are designed to provide low cost solutions for these vehicles and solve as many design flaws as possible. DEC specializes in aftermarket parts for European models, and takes pride in their quality.

Can these issues be Prevented?

Beyond standard tune up work, there are some things that the customer can have performed to prevent issues in the future. The car should be de-carboned at every other oil change or every 10,000 miles using a product such as Seafoam or B-12 administered through either a vacuum line or the fuel rail. The head bolts on 2.8L models should be checked for tightness. And the customer should use high quality synthetic oils, such as Royal Purple, Amsoil, or Redline to prevent seal failure and to reduce engine temperatures.